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Input from the Economic Commission for Europe to the high-level political forum on sustainable development

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat hereby transmits the input from the Economic Commission for Europe to the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

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Input from the Economic Commission for Europe to the high-level political forum on sustainable development

I. Attendance

1. The first session of the regional forum was held on 25 April 2017 and was chaired by Laurence Monnoyer-Smith, Commissioner General for Sustainable Development and Interministerial Delegate for Sustainable Development for the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Seas of France.

2. The session was attended by representatives of the following 46 member States of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE): Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uzbekistan.

3. The European Union was represented by the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva, the European Environment Agency and Eurostat.

4. Representatives of the following United Nations departments, funds and programmes, specialized agencies and related organizations attended the meeting: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the International Labour Organization, the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Group, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Headquarters in New York, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, the United Nations Office at Geneva, the United Nations Office for Project Services, the United Nations Population Fund and the World Health Organization (WHO).

5. Representatives of the following intergovernmental and regional organizations also took part in the session: the Asia-Europe Foundation, the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank, the Council of Europe, the Eurasian Economic Commission, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and Scaling Up Nutrition.

6. Representatives of 97 non-governmental organizations as well as of other organizations also participated. A complete list of participants can be found on the website of the regional forum (www.unece.org/rfsd2017.html).

II. Opening and adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)

Documentation: ECE/AC.25/2017/1

7. The regional forum adopted the provisional agenda (ECE/AC.25/2017/1).

8. The Executive Secretary of ECE welcomed all participants and acknowledged progress in many countries towards sustainable development, including national strategies, stakeholder involvement and the fact that some countries now measured new legislation based on their impact on the Sustainable Development Goals. He stressed how the Goals were pushing all members of the United Nations family and other international organizations to work together in new and effective ways. At the opening session, a group of young students associated with the Eduki Foundation, a Geneva-based organization that promotes the education and awareness of youth of the work of international organizations, offered their views on the need for a strong and broad commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and indicated that the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals should involve youth, including through practical projects carried out by young people. In her opening remarks, the Chair emphasized the diversity of the ECE region and underlined the importance of mobilizing all sectors for success.

9. Several representatives of the United Nations system addressed the forum at the opening session. The Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations emphasized that the United Nations system needed to engage with countries at different levels and that regional commissions were instrumental in mobilizing political leadership and facilitating partnerships, and, through them, could lead to regional and global public goods. The Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs drew attention to the importance of the regional dimension and the need to improve coherence, strengthen collaboration and facilitate communication as part of the overall efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Assistant Secretary-General of UNDP, who also serves as the Assistant Administrator and Regional Director for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States and as Chair of the regional United Nations Development Group team for Europe and Central Asia, outlined the multiple risks that the region is facing and stressed the role of the 2030 Agenda in addressing those challenges. She emphasized the need to focus efforts on the most vulnerable and identify accelerators to drive forward the implementation of the Goals, and that gender equality was a key accelerator of progress across the 2030 Agenda and the multiple Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

III. Policy segment: the second year of the Sustainable Development Goals in the region — knowing where we stand and moving on to prosperity and well-being for all (agenda item 2)

Documentation: ECE/AC.25/2017/INF2

10. The policy segment, which was moderated by the Executive Secretary of ECE, provided a platform for a cross-sectoral exchange and discussion on progress thus far and pending challenges for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the ECE region, with a particular focus on prosperity, health and well-being and gender, within the broader theme of the high-level political forum of 2017.

11. The policy segment was introduced by a keynote speech by the President of the International Institute for Sustainable Development and followed by a panel

discussion that included the Minister for Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration of Albania; the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs for Non-European Countries, Economic and Development Cooperation of Czechia; the Commissioner General for Sustainable Development and Interministerial Delegate for Sustainable Development for the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Seas of France; the Deputy Secretary-General of OECD; the Director of the WHO Regional Office for Europe; the Secretary-General of the International Chamber of Commerce; and the President of the Forum of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan. The President of the Forum of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan conveyed to the forum the outcome of a preparatory civil society consultation that took place in Geneva on 24 April 2017. Interventions from the floor, including from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Hungary, Slovenia and Tajikistan, also contributed to the discussions at the policy segment.

12. The Chair's summary, included in annex I, presents the main issues raised. Written statements are available on the website of the regional forum.

IV. Peer learning segment (agenda item 3)

Documentation: ECE/AC.25/2017/INF3, ECE/AC.25/2017/INF4 and ECE/AC.25/2017/INF5

13. The peer learning segment was structured as three parallel regional round tables, covering three different topics, to facilitate more in-depth practical exchanges of experiences and best practices.

A. Regional round table I: national and local adaptation of the Sustainable Development Goals

14. Round table I focused on the ongoing process of adapting the global Sustainable Development Goals to national and local circumstances. Reviewing and adjusting national strategies, plans and instruments is a major first step to be taken by governments in the region to start implementing the Goals.

15. Round table I was moderated by the President of the AtKisson Group. Switzerland served as the rapporteur.

B. Regional round table II: subregional cooperation for Sustainable Development Goal implementation

16. The subregional level is important to the creation of a multilayered system of Sustainable Development Goal implementation and follow-up. Neighbouring countries working together can help address issues of common concern, including those of a transboundary nature. The round table shared experiences and discussed how cooperation within the various ECE subregions could help advance the Goals.

17. Round table II was moderated by the Director of the UNEP Regional Office for Europe. Portugal served as the rapporteur.

C. Regional round table III: data and monitoring

18. Improving the data situation and building statistical capacities for the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals remains a significant challenge for all countries in the region and beyond. The round table provided an opportunity

for dialogue between policymakers and statisticians on the needs, feasibility and limitations of Sustainable Development Goal data.

19. Round table III was moderated by France. The United States of America served as the rapporteur.

20. The Chair's summary (see annex I) presents main issues raised in the discussions at each round table. Written statements are available on the website of the regional forum.

V. Reporting back and closing (agenda item 4)

21. The rapporteurs reported back to the plenary of the regional forum the main messages resulting from the discussions at each round table (see annex I).

22. The regional forum heard a closing address by students facilitated by the Eduki Foundation. In her closing remarks, a civil society representative emphasized that the space for civil society was shrinking and stressed the importance of meaningful participation of civil society organizations in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the need to provide an institutional mechanism for that participation. The Executive Secretary of ECE remarked on how ideas are now becoming actions that advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He emphasized the ways in which a multi-stakeholder approach had been critical for the development of the Goals and now was even more important to their implementation. The Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva acknowledged the convening power of ECE and its historical role in bridging divides. He introduced the work of the Sustainable Development Goals labs in bringing together various Geneva-based actors and tapping into different sources of knowledge, as well as in taking forward the discussions at the regional forum.

23. Before closing the meeting, the Chair informed participants that the Chair's summary would be circulated for comments by participants. The final version would constitute the official input from the ECE region to the high-level political forum of 2017.

Annex

Chair's summary of the policy segment and the peer learning segment

Policy segment: the second year of the Sustainable Development Goals in the region — knowing where we stand and moving on to prosperity and well-being for all

1. The policy segment provided an opportunity to take stock of the current situation and exchange views on major factors influencing the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Within the overall context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the broader theme of the high-level political forum of 2017, discussions had a particular focus on the key themes of prosperity, health and well-being and gender.

2. Sustainable Development Goals are universal, so they concern all member States without distinction. An Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) pilot study showed that in many countries significant progress was required to meet the goals by 2030. Civil society organizations drew attention to the fact that, even in advanced economies, multidimensional inequality, precarious forms of labour market participation and homelessness remain pressing concerns.

3. Despite progress, there are multiple fragilities in the region, including the looming challenges posed by climate change and large migration movements, in a context in which economic expansion remains moderate. Some participants pointed out that inequality is a serious threat to growth and social cohesion. In order to rally all parties to Sustainable Development Goal implementation efforts, it is necessary to demonstrably show the benefits that advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development brings for all and to emphasize that the Goals are a positive framework for change that can effectively address environmental and inequality concerns. Effective delivery is critical at the current stage so that there can be visible results from policy action. Moreover, some participants stressed that, given the scale of the challenges ahead, the available time is limited.

4. The ambition of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, including the different trade-offs and synergies involved, and the need to ensure balance between the three pillars of sustainable development, has led to new mechanisms of coordination. Different institutional solutions to steer Sustainable Development Goal implementation and facilitate coordination have been deployed throughout the region. In Czechia, for example, the Prime Minister is in charge of preparing the new strategic framework for sustainable development. Innovative mechanisms for the involvement of parliament have also been put in place. In Hungary, a parliamentary ombudsman for future generations provides inputs on initiatives that can affect the quality of life of future generations.

5. While new bodies and mechanisms for Sustainable Development Goal implementation have been or are being created, efforts to mainstream the Goals within existing policy frameworks are critical in order to ensure effective implementation and cope with resource limitations.

6. In some countries, experiences with the Millennium Development Goals provide a starting point. In Tajikistan, long-term development strategies incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals have been developed on the basis of the lessons learned during the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. In Armenia, gaps in Millennium Development Goal implementation have been

identified to inform Sustainable Development Goal strategies, which are based on a systematic screening of legislation in order to define a road map.

7. The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals requires the adaptation of both domestic and foreign policy strategies. Some countries have already revised or developed new development cooperation initiatives that are aligned with the Goals. Policy coherence between domestic and international actions has been recognized as an important element of sustainable development strategic frameworks. The efforts of small countries also matter, as shown by the efforts of Slovenia to strengthen its international development cooperation.

8. Some participants stressed that the Sustainable Development Goals open a new role for international cooperation, creating new opportunities to work together. In some areas, cross-border cooperation is particularly important, including, for example, the public health dimension of the ongoing refugee and migrant crises, or the many implications of climate change, including on health.

9. The United Nations system has provided direct assistance to programme countries in the region, including through rapid integrated assessments and guidance on mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support. Various participants emphasized the importance of that support by the regional United Nations system. For example, Georgia counts on help from the United Nations to develop a monitoring and evaluation system for Sustainable Development Goals, which is still missing in that country. Some participants stressed the positive role that a strengthened United Nations at the regional level will continue to play in assisting member countries in advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

10. Given the complexity of the Sustainable Development Goals and the numerous policy areas involved, many actors need to be engaged in implementation. Breaking down silos and bringing together stakeholders that may have opposing interests shows the central challenge to implementing the Goals: dealing with complexities and identifying interrelations to find durable solutions with the agreement of partners. Effective policy action requires attracting new allies and actors, for example, engaging municipalities and mayors in health-related interventions. However, it was emphasized that the ultimate responsibility for the Goals lies with governments and that concrete policies reflect different national choices.

11. New ways to cooperate are emerging, based on reciprocity and shared benefits. Technological possibilities are opening different channels to exchange knowledge, tapping into new constituencies and reaching out to different demographic groups. Some participants mentioned that the concentration of development partners in Geneva working on multiple aspects of the Sustainable Development Goals provides a favourable ecosystem that facilitates collaboration and information exchange.

12. There was a strong recognition of the role of civil society in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. While the engagement of civil society is taking place mainly through organized groups, individual citizens, through their own initiatives and personal commitments, also have a role to play. To facilitate dialogue and encourage involvement, communication remains a critical factor. In Azerbaijan, the importance of awareness campaigns, including in schools, has been stressed. Strengthening ownership by society at large will promote increased public participation. Civil society organizations called for effective and meaningful engagement of civil society in all its diversity in the regional and national Sustainable Development Goal processes and are seeking the creation of a regional engagement mechanism.

13. In France, the mobilization of civil society has been a defining feature of its plans for Sustainable Development Goal implementation, which include a highly

structured programme of identification and engagement of partners across different goals, sometimes building on existing processes and carrying on the impetus stemming from the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Agreement on Climate Change. In that context, the strong synergies between the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as the contribution of the multi-stakeholder coalitions under the Global Climate Action Agenda for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, were highlighted.

14. Some participants emphasized that all stakeholders should be involved, including those that are profit-oriented, and that it was important to reach a common understanding of the needs and possibilities of both the public and the private sectors in Sustainable Development Goal implementation, which will require the use of a language that the business sector understands. Business opportunities have emerged in connection with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the private sector is increasingly aware that addressing sustainability is necessary and can be profitable. At the institutional level, business associations such as the International Chamber of Commerce are committed to working with the United Nations to advance the Goals. However, a meaningful contribution to sustainable development requires businesses to respect social, labour and environmental standards.

15. Putting in place the necessary infrastructure will require tapping into appropriate sources of financing. The rapid growth of green finance, including green bonds, was singled out as an auspicious trend. It was remarked that incentive structures in financial markets need to be changed, so they appropriately reflect sustainability issues. Blended finance, where public resources are used to de-risk investments, can be deployed to involve the private sector in pursuing public goals, including those related to infrastructure. It is clear that official development assistance (ODA) is insufficient to meet development goals and that the private sector needs to be involved, therefore new partnerships are required. However, civil society organizations called for ODA commitments to be upheld while including civil society organizations in public-private partnerships and other mechanisms that blend private and public finance. Clear accountability frameworks covering all development actors should be in place.

16. Health and well-being are outcomes, determinants and enablers for Sustainable Development Goals. Without health, many Sustainable Development Goals may not be achieved; at the same time, health itself benefits from progress towards other Goals. Health 2020, the European health policy framework, is fully aligned with the Goals and instrumental to their achievement. Bright spots in the region include higher life expectancy, reduced maternal mortality and a downward trend in non-communicable diseases. However, an overall positive picture masks significant differences within and between countries and population groups. Particular groups of women remain at higher risk of adverse outcomes during pregnancy and birth. Although most countries in the region provide at least near-universal health coverage, there are great differences in health services delivery and financing. It was remarked that a rights-based approach is important to effectively tackle those health challenges.

17. There are also many areas where significant improvements are required. For example, if progress on deaths from road injuries continues at the current rate, the region will fall short of the global target of a 50 per cent reduction in fatalities related to road traffic by 2020. Some lifestyle choices damage health and well-being. Environmental determinants account for 16 per cent of deaths in the World Health Organization (WHO) Europe region. Environmental factors and health inequities, which could be avoided by policy interventions, involve large costs.

Multisectoral actions are required to tackle the different factors that influence health outcomes. Addressing the causes of preventable deaths requires a particular focus on influencing the behaviour of young generations, without forgetting the health challenges posed by ageing societies.

18. As a stand-alone goal, Sustainable Development Goal 5 covers many important dimensions required to tackle the gender inequalities that remain persistent across the region. Gender equality also serves as a means to achieve all other goals, which cannot be met without an end to gender discrimination. Progress on achieving gender equality will facilitate reaching Goal 3 targets on health and well-being, particularly in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights. At the country level, for example, reforms in the agricultural sector in Albania ensure that public support for the sector includes provisions to encourage women's businesses and promote their engagement in economic activities. France has produced a map of the relations between Goal 5 and other goals, creating a tool that is projected to be used for other goals as well. In Georgia, developing an appropriate legal framework and being sensitive to gender issues has been an early concern. Tajikistan also recognizes gender as a cross-cutting issue in its development plans.

19. However, it was also mentioned that much remains to be done and that some trends are not encouraging. The amount of gender-related ODA is declining; civil society organizations emphasized that funding for women's rights organizations has been reduced and that formal provision of high-quality childcare and long-term care for the elderly is virtually non-existent in many countries in the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE). Increased public investment is required to advance Sustainable Development Goal 5 and reap the positive influence of gender equality on other Sustainable Development Goals.

20. Many participants emphasized the close linkages that exist between different Sustainable Development Goals. The integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development opens new and more complex spaces for policy intervention. Navigating those spaces requires a good understanding of the relations between different goals but also an ability to work together across sectoral and organizational boundaries.

Regional round table I: national and local adaptation of the Sustainable Development Goals

21. Multiple initiatives are being carried out across the ECE region to advance the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Countries appear determined to make an early start by reviewing existing mechanisms and strategies while introducing different legal, institutional and policy changes. Although resources remain constrained, the overall picture for the region is that progress is taking place. However, significant efforts will be required in all countries, even the most developed.

22. Countries have revised existing strategies and sectoral plans or introduced new ones in the light of the Sustainable Development Goals. Existing policies are being inventoried and their contribution to the Goals assessed, including through the mapping of goals and targets, stocktaking and gap analysis. Work may proceed at varying speeds in different policy areas and, in some countries, different ministries may have reached various degrees of readiness. Actions undertaken concern both the external and the domestic dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Some countries are putting the Goals at the core of their development policies and humanitarian actions.

23. National implementation plans do not take place in a vacuum, so there is a need to understand how new Sustainable Development Goal priorities relate to previous policy initiatives. In the countries of the European Union, there are ongoing efforts to establish linkages between the agenda of the European Union and the Goals. The new or revised strategies often consider the institutional and social contexts of Goal implementation. Consultative processes have also been used in many countries to make those assessments.

24. Some participants reflected that the process of adaptation should also pay attention to the need for simplification to avoid the proliferation of too many policy documents. In some cases, targets are nationalized and introduced into existing reporting systems, with the possible inclusion of alternative indicators that reflect domestic challenges and political priorities. Some countries, such as Denmark, are undertaking a systematic assessment of new legislation with regard to its conformity with Sustainable Development Goal implementation. Overall, the process of incorporating the Goals into national legal and policy frameworks seems well advanced in the region.

25. The importance of broad political ownership was emphasized by various participants. The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals requires a clear institutional framework, one in which the key role and contribution of the parliament is clearly recognized. In some countries, such as the Netherlands, existing procedures determine the involvement of the parliament on Goal implementation, including with regard to reporting and the connection to the budgeting process. The increased engagement of the legislature is an important trend throughout the region, but some participants, while recognizing ongoing progress, felt that more effort is needed to involve parliamentarians.

26. The Sustainable Development Goals need to be translated into a language that can be effectively used in political debate, as shown by the experience of Romania. Handbooks to assist parliamentarians may be useful as a part of a broader effort to communicate with and educate people about the Goals. Overall, increasing awareness of the Goals across multiple groups, including the media, is important. Advocacy work should have a broad reach, and include a range of constituencies and geographies to ensure the active participation of all actors at various levels. Innovative and media-friendly approaches can be useful when seeking to engage various groups. Accessible technologies should be deployed to reach persons with disabilities.

27. Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals requires the creation of appropriate coordination structures, which have an intrinsic intersectoral character. They may take various forms in different countries, depending on governments and national choices. Some participants remarked that institutional changes appear particularly challenging and that institutional innovations are desirable but have been limited.

28. Typical coordination mechanisms include national councils of sustainable development for top-level discussions and working groups and subgroups focusing on specific areas. In Belarus, particular emphasis has been put on wide representation within those mechanisms to ensure both horizontal and vertical coordination. In Armenia, a new institution, operating as a public-private partnership, has been created to support long-term strategic reforms and analyse existing strategies. In Montenegro, improving governance and strengthening institutional capacities are seen as significant factors in the early implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

29. The importance of the local level was stressed by some participants. While multiple ongoing initiatives already exist at the national level, there is much work

yet to be done at the regional and local levels. The relevance of the regional and local levels depends on the degree of decentralization, and it may be particularly significant for countries such as Switzerland, where lower levels of government have broad competencies. In any case, it is clear that, while the political impulse for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development came from national governments, authorities at all levels need to be brought on board for the successful adaptation and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Partnerships are key to advancing the Goals, and many of them can be struck at the local and regional levels. In some countries, support from the United Nations may be of use in reaching out to local and regional authorities and complementing their capacities.

30. Horizontal and vertical coordination across different policy areas and government levels is important, but multiple stakeholders should also be involved, in both implementation and monitoring. In particular, various participants emphasized the role of the private sector and that involving stakeholders was not a burden but a positive contribution to Sustainable Development Goal implementation.

31. Underlining the importance of civil society participation, there were proposals to bring the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into educational curriculums, as championed by Norway, in order to further spread the knowledge of the Sustainable Development Goals and their implications. Some participants emphasized the importance of youth as an agent of change and shared examples of existing country experiences that showed how to tap into that potential but, at the same time, others expressed concern that existing mechanisms for youth involvement were still insufficient.

32. There is a need to preserve policy stability beyond political changes and create a long-term vision for national development. In Turkey, different initiatives are anchored in long-term plans that identify core priorities. In Finland, a broad consensus on focus areas has been reached which is expected to survive changes in government. By contrast, specific actions to make progress in those particular areas may be subject to review, reflecting changing political choices.

33. Countries are experimenting with different schemes and learning from early experiences, which underlines the relevance of mechanisms for knowledge-sharing, as provided by the regional forum on sustainable development. Peer learning within and across different national constituencies is being sought but remains challenging. At the international level, the role of the European Sustainable Development Network was mentioned.

34. The importance of a monitoring and evaluation framework was stressed by many participants. As in the case for implementation, multiple partners should be involved in those efforts. In some cases, such as in Georgia for Sustainable Development Goal 16, a monitoring and evaluation framework has been developed for a particular Goal in order to build on that experience and develop a more comprehensive framework. Some participants remarked on the significance of evidence-based accountability for effective implementation and the fact that it should encompass all stakeholders.

35. Success in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals requires the mobilization of sufficient public and private resources. In most countries, Goals and their targets are linked to action plans that have clear connections with budgetary processes and resource allocation. In some countries, those action plans are used to raise funding from external donors. However, some countries emphasized that resources remain key constraints.

36. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is integrated and indivisible, and there are multiple linkages across the Sustainable Development Goals that

require concerted policy action. However, from a policy point of view, it is critical to look at those actions that have potentially larger impacts across multiple Goals. As available funds are likely to remain unchanged, it is important to focus priority efforts on initiatives that will offer larger results. The correct identification of the size of existing multipliers for policy interventions is not easy, but it would facilitate the establishment of priorities and the use of effectively limited budgetary resources. However, developing criteria for "smart spending" also faces difficulties in the presence of data limitations, including the absence of timelines for relevant variables.

37. There was broad agreement on the particular importance of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, not only as a separate goal but as a cross-cutting issue that greatly influences success in the implementation of other goals. Some countries, such as Belarus and Bulgaria, have made gender equality a particular focus of early Sustainable Development Goal implementation. In others, such as Sweden, gender budgeting is an established practice that evaluates the gender equality effects of budget policies. International partnerships, such as the one between Croatia and Finland, may serve to advance gender mainstreaming through training and knowledge-sharing.

38. The implementation of particular goals may benefit from international cooperation initiatives, such as the Mediterranean Action Plan, which will aid in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 14. By contrast, a lack of clearly identified responsible authorities for implementation could create difficulties in meeting Goal 17.

39. Data remains a problem for the national adaptation and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, even in developed countries. Most countries are struggling with issues of data availability and reliability. Insufficient disaggregation creates difficulties in formulating and evaluating appropriate policies that leave no one behind. In the Netherlands, for example, around one third of indicators cannot yet be measured. In most countries, there are ongoing efforts to develop missing indicators. Civil society organizations raised the need to identify indicators that are relevant for the region, such as, for example, homelessness as an indicator for Goal 1, concerning growing and extreme poverty.

40. Efficient delivery of the support provided by the United Nations system is also an important element of success for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals; it requires strong coordination efforts among United Nations entities. The regional United Nations system is assisting countries in multiple areas, including with regard to the alignment of national policy frameworks with the Goals, institutional arrangements and advocacy efforts. In particular, some participants stressed the role of the United Nations, including its regional commissions, in helping countries to address data problems. Sustainable Development Goal dashboards are being developed in some countries with the assistance of the United Nations.

41. Some participants also encouraged the regional forum to take advantage of relevant outcomes of the sixty-seventh session of ECE and their follow-up processes. That would not need to involve changes in the work programme of ECE or its budget, but it does demand increased collaboration with other United Nations agencies, drawing on past best practices, such as those related to the collaboration between ECE and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

Regional round table II: subregional cooperation for Sustainable Development Goal implementation

42. The implementation of and follow-up to the Sustainable Development Goals is taking place at various levels: global, regional, subregional, national, subnational and local. All levels are necessary within a multilayered system to live up to the ambition and complexity of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The subregional level is very relevant, as geographical proximity, shared features and problems, as well as the existence of institutions, create a strong rationale for cooperation and the exchange of experiences and solutions, in particular in an area as diverse as the ECE region.

43. Against that background, regional round table II focused on the contribution of subregional cooperation to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The discussion was structured around three core issues: the thematic areas in which subregional cooperation is most useful; effective forms of cooperation at the subregional level; and the alignment of existing subregional cooperation structures with the Goals.

44. Participants put forward a range of thematic areas in which subregional cooperation could contribute to developing joint solutions. In a number of settings, subregional cooperation has focused on economic integration and cooperation, in particular trade and trade facilitation, cross-border investment and infrastructure, among a limited number of countries. The subregional level is also considered instrumental for cooperation on environmental challenges and the management of shared natural resources, including fresh water, oceans and seas, fishery and marine pollution.

45. Moreover, participants highlighted a number of other areas in which approaches at the subregional level or among a limited number of countries concerned have been pursued, such as environment, water, migration, energy, agriculture, health and youth. Subregional initiatives in those areas have mainly been chosen to address transboundary issues, better respond to emerging challenges and create enabling conditions for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Russian Federation said that refraining from unilateral economic measures and harmonizing existing integration processes was essential for the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the regional level.

46. It was also stressed that the exchange of experiences, capacity-building and learning with regard to the collection of data and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals at the subregional level has proven useful, for instance within the framework of a multi-country exchange organized by the United Nations Development Programme's regional hub in Istanbul. In addition, the subregional level could play an important role in the follow-up and review of relevant Goals.

47. Civil society representatives expressed the view that subregional cooperation in many instances is heavily focused on economic integration, and trade in particular. Extending subregional cooperation to broader issues such as human rights and gender equality would represent a step forward.

48. Reflecting different themes, constituencies and objectives, there is significant diversity among the forms and modalities of subregional cooperation. They range from informal dialogues, thematic initiatives and coalitions to formal intergovernmental organizations and legally binding instruments, which are mainly driven by governments and/or international organizations.

49. A number of United Nations entities presented examples of subregional dialogues, initiatives, partnerships and coalitions, which are contributing to joint solutions and advancing the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in certain areas.

50. International migration is one of the issues for which subregional and regional cooperation is of crucial importance. Cooperation and dialogue on migration has been expanding in different frameworks, actively supported by the International Organization for Migration. Many countries are looking at ways to support the achievement of migration-related aspects of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Regional Consultative Processes on Migration, which promote policy dialogue, cooperation and partnership on migration issues among their member States, provide a well-regarded model for cooperation. They are State-led and ongoing, informal and mostly non-binding. Those types of forums have shown to be effective at building consensus and enabling dialogue and joint work on migration. In that context, subregional and regional consultations contribute to the ongoing intergovernmental process in the General Assembly to develop a global compact for safe, regular and orderly migration, which should, for the first time, present a comprehensive framework for migration governance.

51. Taking into account subregional commonalities with regard to environmental degradation and climate change, cooperation among countries on the management of environmental resources, sustainable agriculture and rural livelihoods could yield significant benefits, for instance in Central Asia. Subregional dialogue and collaboration on Sustainable Development Goal 2 is facilitated and supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and other United Nations and non-United Nations partners. One example of a specific initiative is the Eurasian Soil Partnership, which promotes sustainable soil management among governments and other stakeholders of 13 countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

52. Several subregional initiatives are driven by common challenges in the areas of health and population, including the South-eastern Europe Health Network, the Nordic/Baltic policy dialogue on implementing the Health 2020 vision of WHO and the Black Sea Countries Coalition on Breast and Cervical Cancer Prevention. UNFPA also supports a regional youth network to promote training and education on adolescent sexual and reproductive health and HIV prevention and an initiative among 17 countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia to strengthen the health system response to gender-based violence.

53. Other initiatives under the auspices of the WHO Regional Office for Europe underline that cooperation is not only triggered by geographic proximity, but also by similar circumstances and challenges. That involves, for instance, cooperation on health issues of cities across Europe (within the WHO European Healthy Cities Network), subnational regions (within the Regions for Health Network) and small countries (the small countries initiative).

54. Intergovernmental cooperation within subregional organizations and initiatives is a well-established method of achieving progress in areas of common concern. There is a long-standing tradition of cooperation among the five Nordic countries. The Nordic Council of Ministers promotes cooperation among governments in areas such as environment and youth. The Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation focuses on cooperation among its 12 member States in trade, economic development, road and maritime infrastructure, green energy and agriculture. The broad areas of cooperation among the 18 member States of the Central European Initiative include sustainable economic development and knowledge-based and inclusive societies. In 2016, under the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the

Central European Initiative advanced cooperation with other international and subregional organizations, including the United Nations and the Baltic States.

55. Legally binding instruments are a strong mechanism of subregional cooperation. In particular, the major role of the Regional Seas Conventions and their related Action Plans and of regional fisheries management organizations were emphasized as effective examples of cross-sectoral cooperation on oceans, seas and marine resources, which are shared by neighbouring countries. That includes instruments administered by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP): the Mediterranean Action Plan and the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention), the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (Tehran Convention) and the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Carpathian Convention). It also includes other regional bodies beyond those administered by UNEP.

56. Cooperation on oceans and seas can also be fruitful between a few coastal states for the preservation and sustainable management of a particular area. One example is the trilateral "RAMOGE" agreement among France, Italy and Monaco, aimed at preventing and reducing marine pollution along a coastal stretch connecting the three States. In addition, the application of regional or global agreements at the subregional level or even in a local cross-border context was highlighted as an important aspect. For example, cooperation on water management between the Canton of Geneva in Switzerland and neighbouring communities in France takes place within the overall framework of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention).

57. A number of more informal initiatives with a subregional perspective are actively contributing to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In more formal cooperation structures, efforts to review and align activities and instruments with the Goals are ongoing. For instance, within the Nordic Council of Ministers, a joint initiative on the Goals is under way, as well as a Goal mapping exercise and the integration of the Goals into the existing cooperation among Nordic countries. Within the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the focus on joint action for Goal implementation is being strengthened. Notwithstanding those positive examples, some participants expressed the view that there is still potential to raise awareness of the Goals and accelerate their integration into some subregional and regional activities.

58. In view of a rich and dynamic landscape of subregional mechanisms, several participants stressed that horizontal coordination, cooperation and coherence between various subregional and regional platforms was essential, as was vertical consistency at the local, national and global levels. Within the United Nations, the creation of issue-based coalitions on health, gender, adolescents and youth, social protection and migration by the regional United Nations system in Europe and Central Asia was referred to as an innovative approach to coordinate activities among different United Nations agencies, which was, at the same time, open to the involvement of external partners.

59. Several participants emphasized the importance of developing multi-stakeholder partnerships as a crucial means of Sustainable Development Goal implementation, including at the subregional level. Partnerships and coalitions involving all relevant international organizations, local authorities, civil society, academia and businesses will be an important complement to intergovernmental cooperation. Some participants, including from the science community, called for the strengthening of dialogue and a more systematic involvement of science and research institutions. The Ocean and Climate Initiatives Alliance was mentioned as a promising

multi-stakeholder action framework to implement the Paris Agreement on climate change and contribute to the achievement of the Goals beyond climate issues, in particular Goal 14.

60. Representatives from civil society called for a meaningful and institutionalized involvement of civil society in Sustainable Development Goal implementation, follow-up and review at all levels, including regional and subregional levels. The creation of a regional civil society engagement mechanism could be useful in that regard and in the light of shrinking space and funding constraints for civil society engagement in parts of the region. Civil society stands ready as a partner not only in discussions, but also as a source of advice and expertise in the implementation of the Goals.

Regional round table III: data and monitoring

61. The comprehensive and ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development underscores the importance of quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data to measure progress and ensure that no one is left behind. The statistical community has taken up that challenge and initiated Sustainable Development Goal-related activities at national, regional and global levels.

62. Against that background, regional round table III provided the opportunity for policymakers and statisticians to share insights on core issues with regard to Sustainable Development Goal data and monitoring. The discussion was structured around the role and limits of official statistics, cooperation between policymakers and statisticians, the strengthening of statistical capacities and coordination and cooperation among different actors.

63. The first United Nations World Data Forum in January 2017 brought together data producers and data users and launched a global action plan for sustainable development data. At the global level, in March 2017, the United Nations Statistical Commission adopted a global indicator framework with more than 240 Sustainable Development Goal indicators as well as a draft resolution that included basic elements regarding data flows between the national and global levels.

64. At the national level, the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals has started in many countries with the adoption or adjustment of national sustainable development strategies. National councils for sustainable development have been established, often with extensive consultation processes and the engagement of multiple actors. The national strategies provide the basis for national statistical systems to develop national indicators in an open stakeholder process to enable tracking the progress in implementing those strategies, and to develop national action plans to produce the data. In some countries, such as Albania, baseline reports for Sustainable Development Goals are being developed.

65. Policymakers need timely and reliable data for evidence-based decision-making. As pointed out by several participants, interaction and dialogue between policymakers and statisticians is therefore of great importance. To achieve sustainable development, it is also critically important to strengthen statistical communication and allow all users equal access to data, following the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics as set out by the General Assembly in its resolution 68/261.

66. National statistical offices have a key coordinating role in generating, disseminating and administering Sustainable Development Goal-related data. Countries are currently able to produce roughly about one third of the Goal indicators. Even developed countries with strong statistical systems, such as

Germany, cannot produce more than half. Participants agreed that all countries need to increase their statistical capacity. In some instances, there may be a need to strengthen the statistical institutional framework to ensure the necessary coordination with other actors, including academia, civil society and the private sector, and to improve statistical quality, as highlighted by Montenegro. That requires political support and appropriate funding. Education to improve statistical literacy among present and future generations is also necessary.

67. Support should also come from donors, through South-South cooperation and partnerships. Several participants observed that there was a need to think differently about statistical capacity-building, namely to learn to better coordinate and match the supply and demand for capacity-building, and look for partnerships. Examples of such partnerships were mentioned, such as "twinning projects" conducted with the involvement of the European Union and the World Bank.

68. The United Nations system also has an important role to play in providing capacity-building to countries, with specialized agencies offering support in their areas of expertise. Concepts used for developing countries could be tailored to the needs of developed countries, as suggested by FAO. The WHO Regional Office for Europe had been asked by its member States to propose a process for establishing a joint monitoring framework that includes common indicators of the Health 2020 framework, the Sustainable Development Goals and the global action plan on non-communicable diseases, resulting in a reduced list of core indicators. UNFPA pointed out that 93 indicators are population-based and stressed the strong synergies between the Goals and the International Conference on Population and Development process. UNFPA also mentioned its collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund in middle-income countries in the region and with WHO on data and indicators related to sexual and reproductive health. The International Labour Organization and others emphasized the necessity for the United Nations system to come together and develop joint capacity-building programmes, as most Goal indicators are under the custodianship of more than one United Nations agency.

69. The regional road map developed by the Conference of European Statisticians steering group on statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals was considered a useful tool to provide practical guidance to countries to build up a robust measurement system for the Goals. Statisticians in the ECE region are piloting and exploring solutions that can be used later by countries in other regions.

70. For member States of the European Union, Eurostat is producing official statistics according to requirements set by a code of practice. The European Environment Agency is collecting data from a network of about 39 countries in specific focus areas, and pointed out the challenge of filtering out relevant, timely and high-quality data.

71. OECD has undertaken a pilot study of selected member States to establish their starting positions on individual targets to help governments with the development of national action plans.

72. The WHO Regional Office for Europe proposed the establishment of a European information initiative, mirroring its own European Health Information Initiative, to coordinate information and statistical issues in the region with all stakeholders at regular intervals.

73. Some participants, including from civil society organizations, pointed to specific issues and groups addressed in the Sustainable Development Goals with a particular need for more and better-quality data, including on migration, human trafficking, early marriage, older persons and persons with disabilities. It was also suggested that countries in the ECE region could go beyond the baseline established

in the global indicator framework and develop more ambitious indicators to take the lead on specific issues, for example with regard to gender equality, as supported by Monaco. The Council of Europe proposed that accession to specific legally binding conventions and the results of related monitoring mechanisms could serve as indicators at the regional level for a specific target, such as its Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. Other participants emphasized areas that are new to official statistics, such as governance or means of implementation and human rights indicators. Methods to measure those areas in an internationally agreed and comparable way need to be developed.

74. There was agreement that not all of the Sustainable Development Goal data could be produced by using traditional methods, and some warned that work on missing indicators should not distract countries from developing and strengthening their national statistical systems.

75. Some of the Sustainable Development Goal data would need to come from outside the official statistical system. Big data and geospatial, satellite and administrative data all needed to be considered. Participation from academia, the private sector, civil society and the media, among others, was needed in that regard.

76. However, using alternative sources came with its own challenges because data quality often might not be sufficient and the information source might not be sustainable. Ensuring data confidentiality and reducing respondent burden were also important concerns. The Conference of European Statisticians, through its High-level Group for the Modernization of Official Statistics, is working actively to explore the use of other data sources, such as administrative registers and big data.

77. Several participants, including Canada and the Russian Federation, highlighted the need to streamline the various international reporting processes, as there was significant overlap among the different reporting frameworks.

78. In conclusion, participants emphasized that no country or organization could succeed on its own: collaboration and cooperation were needed at all levels and with all relevant stakeholders to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The round table had provided a useful opportunity for dialogue, mutual learning and the exchange of experience. ECE was encouraged to continue such dialogues in the framework of the regional forum on a regular basis, taking advantage of other regional and global processes to maximize impact.